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OBSERVATIONS  
ON THE  
Present State of the Game  
IN  
ENGLAND,  
IN WHICH

The late METHODS of PRESERVATION are  
clearly refuted and condemned :

THE  
REAL CAUSE, or CAUSES of the DEFICIENCY  
DEMONSTRATED;  
AND  
PROPOSALS

Offered for its more sure and effectual  
PRESERVATION.

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BY WILLIAM TAPLIN.

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L O N D O N :

Printed for T. DAVIES, in *Russel-Street, Covent-Garden.*

M DCC LXXII.

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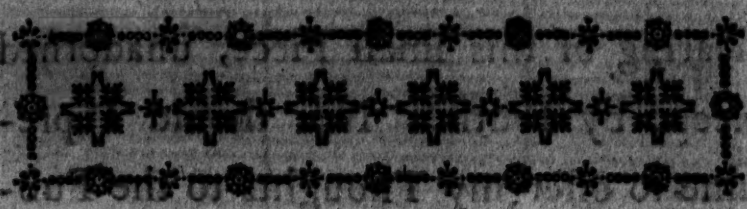
BY WILLIAM TAPLIN.

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L O N D O N :

Printed for T. Davies in Pall-mall, near St. James's Church.  
M DCC LXXXIII.





# OBSERVATIONS

ON THE

Present State of the

GAME, &c.

**T**H E many Dissertations, Observations, and Dialogues on this Subject, that have been crouded on the World, recommended with the Language of experienced Authors, ornamented with all the flowing Elegance of Rhetoric, give me little Reason to expect a candid

A

Hearing

Hearing of this small Piece, unadorned except by Truth, Nor should I presume to offer my Thoughts to the Public on this Subject, had I not a thorough Knowledge of the Methods of pursuing, taking, and killing Game as a *Sportsman*; together with the Arts of destroying, practised by the *Poachers*. It is not in my Power, nor is it necessary, to ornament the following Observations, with the refined Sentiments of an *Orator*; nor to introduce, for the Amusement of my Readers, any classical Quotations.

I write this to demonstrate to the Public in general, and to the *Fair Sportsmen* in particular, that the present Mode of Preservation is arbitrary, unjust, absurd, and contemptible. It never can, or will increase the Stock of  
Game,



Game; on the contrary must unavoidably reduce it to a State below what it has ever been. I think I may, from the Absurdity of the Publications that have appeared on this Subject, conclude that the Authors have never seen Partridge, Hare, or Pheasant, but those that they have pursued and killed in the extensive Field of their Imagination.

There has been no Subject that has been more canvassed, and less accomplished, than the Preservation of the Game; no Attempt has been more strictly pursued, nor so little attended with Success. All this has proceeded from a Love of Despotism. Our Representatives have Souls too extensive to execute any thing but by the most arbitrary Measures. Can the Game ever

be preserved by an ill-guided Compulsion? Evident it is, that the Power of Parliament is deficient even in this; we should not therefore be surpris'd that it is so little regarded in Matters of greater Consequence. The Society for the Preservation of the Game, are literally and truly the Destroyers of it. They should know, as Englishmen, that the People of England will not voluntarily scourge themselves.

They may clap on the Mask of Submission for a while, but they have *Hearts too True, too Honest*, to deceive you long; nor will they, while they can oppose Force by Stratagem, give up their Claim to what was intended by the Supreme Being, as an equal Possession from the highest to the lowest.



Is there any one of the *pretended Preservers* that can stand forth with an endless Stock of Eloquence, and contradict that Assertion, founded on the NOBLEST BASIS, TRUTH? If so, I will enter the Lists and oppose him, not only for myself, but in Defence of every Man that thinks himself aggrieved; nor shall all the World alter my Opinion, that we are as much entitled to the Gifts of Nature, as the most powerful Men the Kingdom produces.

I have no Reason to fear, nor am I servile enough to flatter them; they know their Inability, and are ashamed to own it. What do they execute after all their pompous Advertisements? Why they *Meet, Dine, Drink, Game, and Depart.*

*Depart.* What does all their pretended Power tend to? Nothing but to provoke the Laughter of every sensible, well-meaning, honest Man. Even the major Part of their own Society, are sorry that they ever embarked in so barren a Scheme, that has never been productive of the least Success. Their Meetings have been attended to with the greatest Patience, by all who are or can be in the least concerned in them; who have seen, that, like Major Sturgeon's Company, they have had Marches, Counter-Marches, and Meetings without End; and have, after raising our Expectations, like the Mountain in Labour, brought forth a Mouse.

The present State of the Game in this Kingdom requires speedy Redress, or in



a very few Years the Breed will be totally destroyed. The many Manors that are left almost without Hares or Birds, are convincing Proofs of the daily Decrease. They know the Deficiency, but are too haughty and imperious to ask the Preservation of the Game of their Inferiors as a Favour: If they cannot procure it by their ill-judged Authority, their tyrannic Dispositions will not permit them to possess it at all. They should not so much over-rate their Abilities, but shake off that Ostentation that debases them below the Dignity of a common Man, and learn to know they are but Men.

Till the present Act is repealed, there will be almost double the Quantity killed yearly, more than there would be were there

there no Restraint, and every Person had an unlimited Power to kill. This may to many seem a Paradox, particularly so to some, who think there is no Method to increase the Stock of Game, but by reducing the Number of Shooters: This is a most inconsistent Notion, and carries its Absurdity in the Expression. It is most certain if there were more Shooters, there would be more Birds; this is as strictly true as the antient Adage that has been so often experienced, "The more Hounds, the more Hares."

This Adage is so worthy of Remark, that the Hares constantly sit near; nay, I remember to have found in one Day a Leash close to the Kennel of a Gentleman, at *Hale*, near *Farnham*, in *Surry*;

But



But it is easily accounted for thus: The  
 Meushes\* through which the Hares pass,  
 are so enlarged by the Hounds, that the  
 Poacher is prevented from fixing a Wire,  
 and the Hares find the farther they are  
 from the Kennel the more they are dis-  
 turbed; because the Hounds are taken  
 two or three Miles from the Kennel,  
 before they are thrown off; the Hares  
 by Degrees draw nearer the Kennel, and  
 consequently remain more secure and  
 undisturbed.

It is not the *Fair Sportsmen*, if there  
 were treble the Number, that injure  
 the Stock of Game. This I shall de-

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\* Cavities at the Bottom of Pales or Hedges.

B

monstrate

monstrate beyond the Shadow of a Doubt. I think I see some old Country Justice (with ill-nature, appearing like a Varnish on his Countenance) give me the L—; but he little thinks that he must in a future Page stand the Test of Accusation, and be branded a Poacher in the strictest Sense of the Word. The many Arts practised by Poachers, are known but to few of the *pretended Preservers*. If you ask them how the Stock of Game is so reduced? They give you this general Answer, “ By Poachers.” They know not what Persons are so, nor what Arts they use to deserve the Name. They are at a Loss what to pursue to prevent the growing Evil, yet willing to acquire Fame by some Means; they are content, nay, happy to assume the Name

of



of 2 Something they know not how to execute.

What numerous Schemes have been proposed for the Preservation of the Game, that have proved abortive ! It is therefore evident from this, and a Multiplicity of other Circumstances, that the real Cause of the Deficiency has never been truly stated to the Public ; if it had, some Attempts must have been attended with Success. But they know their Hypocrisy, and that if the real Cause is explained, they must shake off the Mask, and appear the very *Poachers*, they tell us, they wish to punish. That I may be the better credited in my future Assertions, I must beg Leave to illustrate this with an Explanation, and a Fact.

A certain Nobleman, whose Park is not a hundred Miles from *Basingstoke* in *Hampshire*, proposed in the last Season a Morning's Courting, and ordered his Game-keeper to go out at Night, when the Hares were gone out of the Park to their Feed, and stop all the Meuses to prevent their Return. This successfully executed, they went out in the Morning, coursed eight Brace, and returned in two or three Hours with no less than four Brace and a Half that they had killed.

If there is a Man base enough to vindicate this Conduct, let him tell me whether this is shamefully, nay, villainously destroying, or increasing the Stock of Game—and yet I make no Doubt but this fair Sportsman is one of the worthy Preservers, and would make an

unqualified



unqualified Farmer pay the Penalty for his Presumption, tho' his Greyhound should start and kill a Hare, even without his Knowledge.

To account for the present Deficiency, I shall begin with the Opinion and Proceedings of the wealthy Farmer, who is a Tenant on a well-stocked Manor. He learns from the Pride and Oppression of his Landlord, (one of the *Preservers*) to despise him, and consequently to destroy every thing that can, in the least add to his Pleasures, or his Despotism. I declare I have often heard a Farmer, not only wish, but order his Sons and Servants, to destroy (in the Harvest) all the Game in their Power; in consequence of which, many Nests and Leverets are destroyed: And no longer  
since

since than *August* 1771, I know that  
 two Brace of *Leverets* were taken and  
 destroyed in a Field of eight Acres, in  
 the Neighbourhood of *Alton* in *Hamp-*  
*shire*. Nor does it stop here, for the  
 very Women and Children who are  
 Weeders in the Corn Fields, will de-  
 stroy the Nests and *Leverets* with the  
 greatest Inveteracy, because the Farmer  
 is excluded the Privilege of killing. He  
 will not attempt to prevent it, but gives  
 you his Reasons for such Proceedings,  
 with an Exultation rather to be ap-  
 plauded than condemned. " For (says  
 he) on my Farm I breed yearly, on  
 the most moderate Calculation, thirty  
 Brace of Hares, and one hundred  
 and twenty Brace of Birds: I am  
 not permitted publicly to kill any of  
 these for myself, or to oblige an  
 absent



“ absent Friend, or Relation. My  
 “ Landlord, and his Game-keepers,  
 “ make my House in their Way, and  
 “ almost daily refresh themselves at  
 “ my Expence; and for two Seasons  
 “ past have never offered me either  
 “ Partridge, Hare, or Pheasant. There  
 “ may as well be no Game (continues  
 “ he) if I, who am in Reality the  
 “ Breeder, and in whose Power it is to  
 “ be the Preserver, am not permitted  
 “ to enjoy the Pursuit in common,  
 “ with those who enjoy it by Opp-  
 “ pression.” Can any judicious, un-  
 prejudiced Person condemn his Con-  
 duct, or contradict his Assertion? No!  
 they all know it is too true.—And can  
 the *Preservers* or rather *Destroyers* of  
 the Game, vainly suppose that their  
 arbitrary Measures will deprive the  
 Farmer

Farmer of his Share of Game? If so, it is an absurd Imagination. The Sons have Courage enough to revenge their Fathers Wrongs, and will produce more Game, at their Return from a nocturnal Excursion, than a fair Sportsman after a Pursuit of three Days: *How just!*

The very Labourers imbibe the Farmers Sentiments; their Fidelity to him is indisputable; they will, with a Smile of Satisfaction, destroy a Nest of Eggs ready to hatch, or a Brace of Leverets, and with a noble Spirit of Revenge tell their Employers, "They  
 " had better be killed so, than bred  
 " for Gentlemen; for they'll take care  
 " to give nothing to the Poor, that  
 " they can keep for themselves."  
 How just! How worthy the Attention

of



of many hundreds that roll in Ease and Affluence, is the Countryman's Reflection! May they peruse it feelingly, and mend by the Remembrance.

I have, in the Sporting Season, visited many Farmers, and never saw one that could not take me into his Pantry, and produce a Hare or more, and two or three Brace of Birds. I may be believed, when I assert, that the Farmers will (in Opposition to all the Game Laws that are, or may hereafter be in force) by some Means or other, take that Share of Game, that they are justly and beyond any Doubt entitled to. Nor will they (though often in their Power) prevent, but rather encourage the frequent Robberies of the numerous Poachers, that infest the best

stocked Manors in the Kingdom. Their Conduct deserves the Thanks of every Man who is a Well-wisher to his Country. I applaud their Spirit and Resolution, may they persevere in the same Track, till Methods more equitable are pursued, that may tend to a general Satisfaction.

I have now fully discussed the Farmers Opinion of the present arbitrary Measures, for the Preservation of the Game; and pointed out the many Inconveniencies that attend his being excluded the Privilege of killing; which, upon the strictest Examination, I find to be the grand Source from whence all the succeeding Evils flow. The Opportunities the Farmers have not only to encourage, but to preserve, the Breed of  
Game



Game, is evident to all the World, nor will it admit of a Dispute.

I shall now proceed to an Account of the capital Arts practised by those Poachers, who do take and kill the Game entirely for Sale, which is so common, notwithstanding the extensive Power of the *pretended Preservers*, that you may (in the Season) on your Arrival in almost any Country Inn, by applying to the Landlord, with a Promise of Secrecy, be furnished with any Quantity.

Their general Method of taking Birds is without a Dog, that they may be the less suspected; they walk into the Fields, and disturb the Birds, in the Dusk of the Evening, and observe the Spot they

drop on, which may be done almost to a Yard, as they will not fly far. When they have discovered three or four Coveys in this Manner, and the Night draws in apace, they spread their Net, and by drawing it over the Spot secure every Bird; nor will these mercenary Villains, as is the Custom, set at Liberty the old Birds, as in their own Phrase, "That would be throwing Half a Crown away." They have a Method less certain than this, that they practise on an Emergency: They walk across the Stubbles at the Dawn of Day, when the Wings of the Birds are wet with the Dew, and the Light insufficient to direct them: The Birds will not rise till they are almost trod on; when they do, they throw a Stick of a tolerable Size into the Covey, and often bring down  
a Brace,



a Brace, Leash, or more; I once saw two Brace and a half knocked down in a double Covey; and last Season, heard a Man declare he killed seven and twenty Brace in two Months, in this Manner, and received Half a Crown for every Brace.

Their former Method of wireing Hares, (by which a Man has been known to take seventeen in one Night) is not so much practised as formerly; the Wires having been seen in the Day, Persons have been set to watch, and by that Means many have been discovered and punished. They have therefore left that for the following Method: They fix on some Pieces of Clover, near a Park, or Covert, where they have reason to think Hares usually feed—They  
then

then stop the Meushes through which the Hares usually pass, so that they have no Admission but at the Gates; they return about eleven or twelve at Night, and having fastened Nets to the third Bar of the Gates and staked them to the Ground, turn into the Field a small Dog with a Muzzle on to prevent his barking; as soon as the Hares find themselves pursued, they run for the Gates and unavoidably into the Nets—I have been credibly informed that three Brace and a half of Hares have been caught in one Night by this Method, in a Field of five Acres, adjoining to a small Covert.

These frequent Ravages among the Game, if there were more Shooters permitted, would never happen; every

Man



Man who had an equal Property in it, would consequently protect it. But why should a Man who prefers Ease and Tranquillity to riotous Informations and Law-suits, inform against another, for taking that which is made the Property of those he has no Reason to respect, and for what he can purchase of the very Person, if he has Occasion ; it is therefore plain to him, that as he is not permitted to shoot, he is rather useful, and wisely concludes, it would be a glaring Absurdity to make that Man his Enemy, that he may reap an Advantage from by making his Friend.

The Society may be assured that this is the Estimation the Poachers are held in at present by the Majority of this Kingdom ; and that Time, and the rapid

rapid Decrease of the Game, will oblige them to repeal that Act that they have been so amazingly strenuous to support.

The next Class who are known by all but their Employers to be the greatest Poachers, are the pretended Preservers, Deputies, called Game-keepers. You will, in this Observation, plainly perceive the old Adage verified, of "The Biter bit." For it is a notorious Fact, that these worthy Servants (the very Copies of their amiable Masters) kill one Brace for their Employers and two for themselves. The extensive Game Trade that is carried on by these plush-coated, black-capped Gentry with the Road Waggoners, would, to those unacquainted with it, surpass Belief.

And



And perhaps it may not be believed when I declare that a Road Waggoner told me he had brought to him at a small Public House, between *Alton* and *Winchester*, one and twenty Hares at one Time, by a Game-keeper; that he paid him as many Half Crowns, and that on his Arrival in *London* he received three Shillings and Six-pence for each of a Poulterer.

This carries with it such Conviction, as cannot be confuted; these Circumstances will lead every Man, who is not blind to Conviction, to a thorough Knowledge of the Cause or Causes of the Deficiency. Let any Man, however prejudiced, tell me how long this Number of Hares might have been pursued by the Sportsmen's Laws

D

of

of Guns, Hounds, and Greyhounds, before they could have been destroyed? It corroborates my former Assertion, that Sportsmen never can, however numerous, injure the Game, equal to such Ravages as these. Was Game, by a Repeal of the Act, reduced to Nothingness in Value, there would be no Stir about it—the Difficulty and Hardship of Prohibition, which Englishmen cannot brook, would be buried in Oblivion, and Numbers never seek for either Hares or Partridges, that do it now merely for Opposition.

The Crime is not in Reality the Game-keepers, but their Employers; who very generously give a Man Twenty Pounds *per Annum*, to support a Wife and seven, eight, or nine Children:

This



This he finds too little, and prudently takes (as he is compelled to steal) what he thinks he is by Nature as much entitled to as his Employer. The Lord of the Manor is alarmed at the still decreasing State of the Game, after he has rewarded a Person so *very liberally* for the Preservation of it. He again resolves to remedy this if possible, and engages an Under Keeper at the amazing annual Stipend of Ten Pounds. The Head Keeper, for the better carrying on his Trade, which is become absolutely necessary for the Support of his Family, opens his Case to the Under-one; he being a Man of the same Principles, readily enters into Partnership; and they as frequently send up six Brace of Hares, and twelve Brace of Birds, with a Bill of Parcels,

as a *Birmingham* Trader does a Parcel of his own Manufacture.

I think I have clearly demonstrated, that the over-stocking a Manor with Game-keepers is reducing the Stock of Game; and whoever tries the Experiment will ever find the Remedy twice in thrice worse than the Disease. For a Game-keeper, by being on the Spot, and his almost hourly Observations, will know the Haunts of both Birds and Hares, and consequently take more Game in one Night, than a casual Poacher will in a Week. There is but one likely Method to prevent this Evil: The Noblemen and Gentlemen who employ Game-keepers, should more amply reward them; give them a Sufficiency to support themselves and Families,



milks, without being obliged to feed merely to keep their Families from starving.

I have, with some little Pains, almost confuted the Opinions of the many that think Shooters are the Destroyers of the Game: But lest some may think it not sufficiently accomplished, I shall make some little Additions, that will remove their vague Notions, according to my former Words, beyond the Shadow of a Doubt. I shall first oppose their Desire of reducing the Number of Shooters, with my own of reducing the Number of Dogs, with which the Kingdom is at present overstock'd. I don't mean the useful Dogs, but the Thousands that are kept by Mendicants, Gypsies, and others, that can  
scarce

scarce procure themselves the common Necessaries of Life. Will any Person absurdly imagine that a Traveller will keep two or three cut-tail'd Curs without an Employment for them? The Question answers itself. With this Number of Dogs every Camp of Gypsies and Mendicants travel; and during the Season, it is from Circumstances well known in the Country, that they more than half subsist upon Game. For what Purpose does every Labourer keep his cross-bred, coney-cut long Dog, and take him daily to his Work; but that in his going, or coming he sometimes starts a Hare, and the very next Day he makes a very decent Appearance in a homely Pye, for the Use of his Family.

There



There is no Method to prevent the Breed and general Increase of these superfluous Animals, but by a severe Tax upon Dogs. Why are the present worthy Commons so averse to this necessary and useful Tax? Sure there are no Sportsmen, but would rather have their two, three, or four Brace of Pointers, or Spaniels taxed, than the Game destroyed, as at present. I can tell them why they are averse to it: It is their *saunch Packs* that they cannot afford to tax, though they will set you two or three thousand for Hours together, and nick seven with eleven for the Bank itself, were it in their Possession; and sooner lose Five Thousand upon a Match on the *Beacon Course*, or from the *Ditch in*, than pay five Pounds for the Good of their Country. I hope their Failure in the Game

Act

Act has taught them to know that when  
oppressive Acts are passed, they will ever  
be totally disregarded. In Opposition to  
their unlimited Prohibition, every Beg-  
gar and Gipsy wire their Hares, and net  
their Birds without a single Remem-  
brance of so arbitrary a Set of People.

I doubt not but the old Country Jus-  
tice by this Time thinks me fashionable,  
that I have forgot my Promise, and  
that his amiable Character is to be  
omitted; but he little knows me, if he  
thinks I can have forgot so capital a *Pre-  
server* of the Game; I must therefore  
remind him that he was once a Sports-  
man, 'till his constant Attendance at  
every Quorum and Venison Feast in the  
County, gave Mr. Gout an Opportunity  
of seizing him by the Hands and Legs,  
and



and throwing him bound in Flannels into his great-arm Chair for Life. Too wise to be abstemious, he indulges still in every Luxury, and allays the sharper Pains of the Gout, by some few *Bumpers* of consoling Claret. In this happy State the Justice spends the Year undisturbed: Till the Month of *September* brings with it Letter after Letter, containing the Wishes of *London* Cousins out of Number for Game; and the Justice is of so very generous a Disposition, that he cares not how many he can oblige, so it is attended with no *Expence*: The Bailiff, in consequence of the Letters arrived, is summoned to the Hall, and ordered to go out that Night, and not to bring Home any *more* than eighteen Brace, for they are *all* to go to *London* To-morrow; the Nets are pre-

E

pared,

pared, the Dogs unkennel'd, and precisely at Twelve they start, and in a Couple of Hours return with the Quantity ordered. In this Manner they sweep up Covey after Covey, till the Country is cleared, and by the First of October, it is a Rarity to find more than the old Birds that have been discharged.

Answer me any impartial Person; can the Game ever flourish under such Practices? Why must a Sportsman, though unqualified, be condemned, who walks from Sun to Sun, for two or three Brace of Birds, when a Method so shameful, so villainous, is nightly practised by the pretended Preservers of the Game? This Method is also practised daily for the Amusement of some

of



of the delicate, sweet-scented young Gentlemen, whose nervous Systems are so subject to disorder, that they could not touch a Gun, nor follow the Hounds upon a filthy Horse, lest the "Nothingness of their Souls and Bodies should be annihilated in a Moment."

I again declare, that if every Person whose Inclination prompts them to shoot, had an unlimited Power, they could not kill half the Number of Birds that are yearly destroyed by Nets; nor do I believe but that near as many unqualified Persons shoot now, as would if the Act was repealed: I speak experimentally, for I have been a Shooter from the first Hour I was able to carry a Gun, and never was stopped but once,

which was by an eminent Council, who has a Manor on the Verge of *Maidenhead Thicket* in *Berkshire*; the Reception he met with was so much to his Satisfaction, that I do not think he will very readily engage in so pleasing a Business again. — That very Gentleman has given me great Reason to say, that many Shooters do not injure, but rather increase the Stock of Game, by teaching them to avoid their Enemies; for though he had with him two Brace of Pointers, and had discharged his Gun eleven Times that Day, his Servant declared he had not killed a single Bird.

I have now, with the strictest Truth and Impartiality, laid open to the Public, the present State of the Game, and have clearly explained the Causes of the present



present Deficiency, together with an Account of those that are Poachers, and the Methods they practise to deserve the Name ; it therefore remains to offer to the *worthy Preservers*, some new Mode for the better, more extensive and successful Preservation of it.

That Part of the present Act that relates to the Time of killing, and the Penalties on buying and selling, I would wish, and think most eligible, to remain in its present State.

The Qualification should be extended to every Freeholder of Five Pounds *per Annum* in *England*, the Game would then have as many Protectors, as it has Enemies now ; every Farmer would prevent the nightly Depredations of Poachers,

Poachers, and the Ravage that happens yearly on every Farm, by Sons, Servants and Labourers.

Killing either Pheasant, Hare, or Partridge in the Snow, should be punishable by a heavy Penalty. Most People are unacquainted with the Quantities killed at that Season. In the Neighbourhood of *Fernham*, in *Surry*, no less than thirteen Brace of Hares were killed in the last Snow in two Days; and a Farmer near *Hastmère* in the same County, shot four Brace of Birds on the Ground, at one Shot in the same Snow.

An annual Tax of five Shillings per Head on every Dog in the Kingdom should immediately take place; and by that



that Means the many thousands of those  
useless Animals would be destroyed.

I shall conclude with my most sincere  
and hearty Wishes to see some spirited  
Man, who knows the wretched State of  
the Game in *England*, propose, and  
carry these necessary Alterations into  
Execution. Were they to take Place,  
the Complaints of the Deficiency would  
cease, and more Game be bred in this  
Kingdom, than ever has been known,  
or ever can be while the present ar-  
bitrary and useless Act remains in  
Force.

*F I N I S.*

that it is the many thousands of these  
valuable Animals would be destroyed.

I shall conclude with my most sincere  
and hearty Wishes to see some settled  
Man, who knows the wretched State of  
the Game in England, propose, and  
carry these necessary Alterations into  
Execution. Were they to take Place,  
the Complaints of the Deceit would  
cease, and more Game be bred in this  
Kingdom, than ever has been known,  
or ever can be while the present  
Barony and other Acts remain in  
force.

F I W I A



